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ABSTRACT

This study sought to understand how multicultural education is socially constructed and enacted by teachers in schools and classrooms. The study explored how and why organizational, individual-teacher, and student factors interact to shape the ways multicultural curriculum is constructed and practiced by teachers in the classroom. The study used social construction theory (a theory that individuals' perceptions of the "reality" around them shape their thoughts and behavior) and a case study design to focus on teachers in four urban elementary schools in northern California. A total of nine teachers were profiled. Data were collected using qualitative methods including semi-guided interviews, observations, and collection of relevant documents. Some of the major themes and ideas that emerged included the following: (1) most teachers addressed both content and process to make education multicultural; (2) many of the teachers advocated combining teacher-centered and student-centered approaches, particularly with minority group students; (3) teachers at schools with many limited English proficient students regarded language diversity and bilingual programs as part of their concept of multicultural education; and (4) teachers' constructions and practices were influenced by leadership, collaborative school structures, and school-wide programs and resources. Overall the study found that teachers reformed their educational approach to address multiculturalism in an ongoing process with a variety of core factors constantly interacting to influence meanings and practices. (Contains 24 references.) (JB)

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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN PRACTICE: TEACHERS' SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS AND CLASSROOM ENACTMENTS

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Paper presented at the 1995 Annual Meeting of the
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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN PRACTICE: TEACHERS' SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS AND CLASSROOM ENACTMENTS

What *is* multicultural education? What is it really all about? The multicultural education movement first emerged in the 1960s in response to charges of racism, ethnocentricism, and language discrimination in schools (Banks, 1992; Gay, 1984; Nieto, 1992). Though the movement grew out of a common cause, over the years multicultural education has been perceived in numerous ways by various groups to match their particular objectives and values, making it increasingly confusing and difficult to determine the nature of the field (Banks, 1991; Hernandez, 1989; Sleeter and Grant, 1987; Stevenson and Gonzalez, 1992). However, perhaps the most severe impediment to reaching a clearer understanding of multicultural education is the paucity of empirical studies exploring,"what happens when teachers work with multicultural education in their classrooms, what forms it takes and why . . . and what barriers are encountered" (Sleeter and Grant, 1987, p. 438). Although there is a general awareness of various types of multicultural curricula and instructional approaches, this lack of research helps explain why there is relatively little known about multicultural education in practice.

In this paper, I review the findings of my dissertation study, which was designed to help fill this knowledge gap in the field by asking the central question: How is multicultural education enacted in classrooms? To arrive at a more meaningful answer to this question, my study centered on teachers' perspectives and classroom practices. The goal was to understand how factors operating in teachers' social contexts interact to produce and shape their constructions and enactments. Teacher conceptions are social and cultural constructions, formed by their experiences and the environments in which they work (Perry & Fraser, 1993). Thus, examining what multicultural education means to teachers provides key insights into the school-site factors that shape their beliefs and practices. It is from these added insights that we can learn more about the factors, issues, and conditions at a school that matter to those who seek to support, facilitate, and practice multicultural teaching.

In addition, instead of focusing merely on curriculum content, my study addressed classroom process issues, such as instructional strategies and other more intangible dynamics like teacher-student relations, classroom climate, peer interactions, and teacher expectations (Banks, 1991; Hernandez, 1989; Nieto, 1992). As Sonia Nieto argues, process issues are often harder to tackle than content, for "changing a basal reader is easier than developing high expectations for all students. The first involves changing one book for another; the other involves changing perceptions, behaviors, and knowledge, [which] is not an easy task" (1992, p. 218). Moreover, several scholars and practitioners argue that focusing exclusively on curriculum content is problematic for the field of multicultural education. Clearly, issues of curriculum content are important to multicultural education. The history of the multicultural education movement stems mostly from efforts to correct distorted or missing information on ethnic groups' experiences and perspectives in curriculum content. However, focusing solely on formal curricular content detracts from a richer, broader, and more complete understanding of multicultural education and the equally important process issues that are involved in this approach (Banks, 1991; Hernandez, 1989; Nieto, 1992).

In sum, from an organizational and social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Goodson, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989), my study explored how and why organizational (e.g, structures, norms, programs, resources), individual-teacher (e.g., personal background, training), and student factors (e.g., ethnicity, age) interact to shape how multicultural curriculum is constructed and practiced by teachers in the classroom. Again, the major research question guiding this study was, "How is multicultural education socially constructed and enacted by teachers within the organizational settings of schools and classrooms?" The research sub-questions were:

1. What are teachers' social constructions of multicultural education?
2. How is multicultural education practiced inside the classroom?
3. What school-site factors (organizational, teacher-individual, students) influence teachers' socially constructions and enactments of multicultural education? How does this occur?
4. How and why are teachers' conceptions and practices varied or similar within and across schools?

This paper presents the major findings of my dissertation study as they apply to each of these questions. Some of the larger themes and issues that emerged from the study are also discussed. I will begin, however, by briefly reviewing the conceptual framework and methodology underlying my research.

Conceptual Framework

Social Construction Theory. To explore teachers' meanings and practices of multicultural education, I turned to social construction theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Rosenholtz, 1989). The theory's major claim is that individuals' perceptions of the "reality" around them shape their thoughts and behavior. Drawing on this theory in her analysis of schools, Susan Rosenholtz (1989) combines organizational theory and the sociology of teaching to examine "teaching as a social construction." The core of her theoretical premise is that teachers' "meanings" are socially constructed within the social organization of schools. The construction of meaning is a process "forged in the crucible of everyday interaction . . . . Meanings of work are exchanged, negotiated, and modified" through everyday interactions with others, such as students and colleagues" (p. 3). The social organizations of schools "contour" teachers' meanings and behaviors. Social construction theory, therefore, supported this study's main objective: to analyze the multiple, interconnected school realities that teachers face (organizational, individual-teacher, student) in order to gain a better understanding of the role these various factors play in the process of constructing teachers' meanings and practices of multicultural education. Scholars in the field argue that attention to the wider organizational school context is critical to approaching multicultural education as a school-wide reform (McCarthy, 1990; Sleeter, 1992). As Sleeter contends, multicultural education should not simply be about changing teachers because teachers act in organizations that cannot be reduced to individuals (Sleeter, 1992, p.147).

Conceptualizing Multicultural Education: Content and Process. Two general dimensions of multicultural education are analyzed in this study -- process and content. Based on her ethnographic case studies of ethnic minority students' experiences in school, Sonia Nieto

(1992) broadly conceptualizes multicultural education as a multi-faceted venture -- a process -- that pervades multiple school factors: teacher-student-parent relations, the curriculum; classroom organization and pedagogy (instructional strategies), teacher professional roles, textbooks, and school organization policies. Broadly defined, multicultural education is viewed more as a philosophy of how educators think about teaching and learning for students of all colors and classes (Nieto, 1992).

Nieto emphasizes that multicultural curriculum reforms not only involve changing content, but also "focus on such intangibles as teachers' expectations, learning environments, . . . [and] students' learning styles" (p. 218). In Nieto's view, addressing these intangible processes of changing perceptions, behavior, and knowledge is often more difficult than adding curriculum content.

Nieto also stresses that multicultural education is itself a process. As she states, "it is impossible to become instantly multicultural. Attempts to do so are [often] . . . superficial" (p. 285). To "say that multicultural education must be comprehensively defined [and] pervasive . . . does not mean that only a full-blown program qualifies . . . . [M]ulticultural education is a process . . . that is in constant flux [and] is never quite finished" (p. 273). It involves teacher learning and unlearning of conventional wisdom and practices. Furthermore, because it is a complex, controversial, and time-consuming approach, and "each teacher and/or school is different in outlook, culture, and student body," Nieto stresses that multicultural education takes a variety of forms in different settings (p. 285). Thus, she argues it is important to explore how and why divergent constructions of multicultural education emerge.

As far as curriculum content is concerned, Nieto defines multicultural education as a basic, core curriculum component. Unlike monocultural education, which merely provides partial knowledge reflective of only the dominant group's reality, a multicultural curriculum is simply good education that provides students with wider multiple perspectives on various events and issues studied in schools. Nieto asserts that a monocultural education negatively impacts students and deprives them of a richer and more complete knowledge base and educational experience. In

short, Nieto argues that curricula that examines issues from multiple perspectives (e.g., ethnicity, gender, class) inform students of the complex realities that exist in the world. Students are encouraged to reflect on these various perspectives and their own experiences in order to strengthen their critical thinking, decision-making, and social action skills.

James Banks offers a similar broad conceptualization of multicultural education, moving beyond content reform to issues of process. Bank's model has four dimensions (1991). The first two -- "content integration" and the"knowledge construction process" --focus on developing what Banks calls a "transformative curriculum." The first dimension involves teachers using content that reflects the experiences of a variety of cultural groups to illustrate key concepts in the discipline. The second involves the process of helping students understand and investigate how implicit cultural assumptions and biases within a discipline influence how knowledge is constructed within it. The goal of the "transformative curriculum" is to empower students with the knowledge and skills that can help them become critical thinkers and influential citizens. The third dimension, "equity pedagogy," centers primarily on the process of modifying teacher practices to be more consistent with a wide range of student abilities and learning styles. Finally, the last dimension, "an empowering school culture," involves teachers and administrators promoting gender, racial, and social-class equality within classrooms and schools. This refers specifically to grouping and labeling practices, interactions among staff and students, and disproportionate enrollment in gifted and special education (1991, p.3-4).

Banks' last dimension concerns process issues within the organizational environment in which multicultural education is enacted. Nieto and Christine Sleeter also highlight this aspect of multicultural education in their research. Nieto argues that teachers' limited decision-making role in schools is a structural problem that alienates and disempowers them from effecting change. She suggests that weekly released time and job sharing are critical organizational reforms that promote teacher professionalism and empowerment. Most importantly, she argues, these restructuring efforts should accompany the translation of multicultural education into practice. Nieto believes that teachers need to be involved in the important work of curriculum design and implementation.

Furthermore, she emphasizes that "[t]he involvement of other teachers with whom [they] work and interact every day is especially crucial" (p. 297). Through such collaboration, teachers can discuss mutual concerns about teaching style and classroom climate, develop and discuss educational strategies, materials, and curriculum, and observe other classrooms and schools that are becoming more multicultural. All of these activities help teachers unlearn, learn, and grow professionally (ibid).

Sleeter's (1992) research on restructuring schools for multicultural education focuses on these same organizational issues. Sleeter looked at structural constraints to curriculum change, such as time, class size, the required curriculum, and the administrative and bureaucratic context of teacher work. Her goal was to identify how these factors affect what classroom use teachers make of what they are learning in staff development on multicultural education. In brief, Sleeter found that within the organizational structure, teachers work in isolation, are given little planning time, and are periodically assigned from one school building to another (p. 145). As a result, few changes in practice occur. Other scholars in the field have also addressed these same organizational issues, as well as the importance of teacher training and teacher education for the implementation of multicultural education (Gould, 1991; Grant, 1991; McCarthy, 1990; Suzuki, 1984).

In sum, these perspectives, as well as those from other scholars holding similar viewpoints (Suzuki, 1984; Hernandez, 1989; King, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Grant, 1991; Gay, 1990), define the two broad, general dimensions of multicultural education -- content and process-- that were explored in this study. Thus, as I explored how teachers construct and practice multicultural education, content and process issues (e.g, instructional strategies; "implicit curriculum" of teacher-student relations, classroom climate; and organizational structures and norms) were considered.

Methodology

To gain an in-depth understanding of multicultural education from teachers' perspectives, I approached this study as an exploratory one, using a case study design to focus on teachers within four urban elementary schools in northern California. The end products were four school case studies with one to four teachers profiled within each. In the end, a total of nine teachers were profiled in the dissertation. Data was collected using qualitative methods, such as semi-guided interviews, observations, and collection of relevant documents. Interviews of teachers and administrators, direct observations of classroom sessions and teacher/staff meetings, and relevant documents served as data sources. Over a period of five months, I spent 90 full days at the four schools, during which I observed each teacher for approximately 20 hours in their classrooms. I also attended staff and teacher meetings and did more general observations throughout the school. A total of seventy-one interviews were conducted with the profiled teachers, as well as forty interviews with other teachers and administrators at the schools.

Using the central research questions as a guide, data analysis occurred during and after data collection. Throughout each phase of data analysis, field notes, interviews, and conceptual memos were coded. In the last phase of analysis, matrices were used to identify patterns of teachers' social constructions and practices of multicultural education (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

Conclusions

Insider Views on Multicultural Education: Insights and Implications

From my observations, interviews, and data analysis I constructed four case studies. The case studies consist of descriptions of each school, including factors in the organizational context that faculty members believed supported and defined multicultural teaching at their school. The central focus of the case studies are the teacher profiles, where individual teachers social constructions are presented along with classroom vignettes that take the reader inside the multicultural classroom. The profiles are presented and analyzed in terms of the various factors that shaped teachers' beliefs and practices of multicultural education. At the end of each case

study, the variety of ways these multiple factors interacted to construct teachers' meanings and enactment are reviewed.

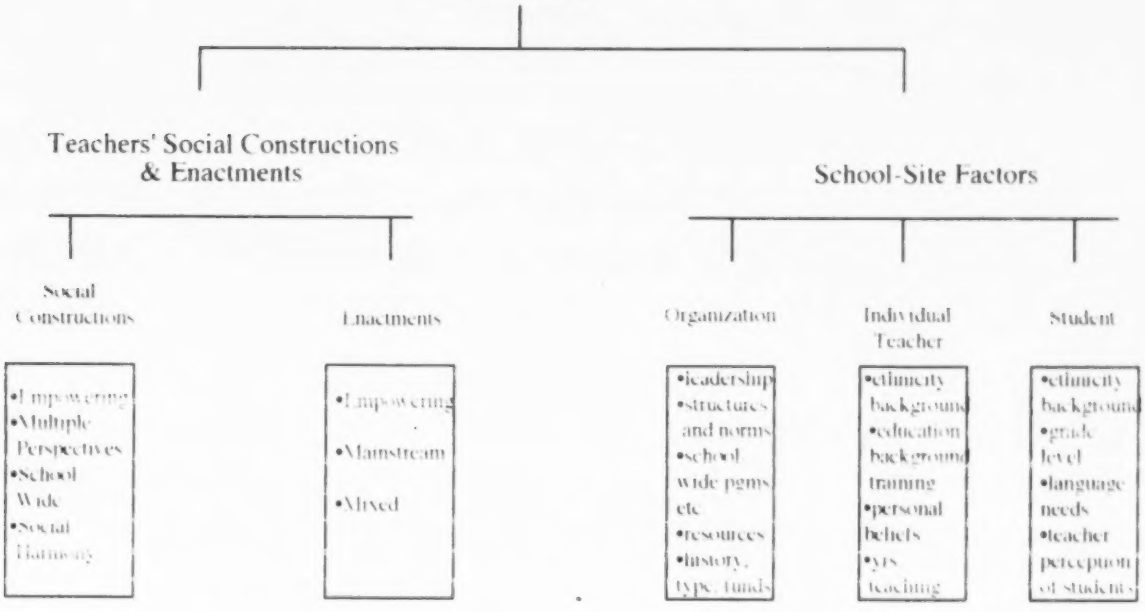
Findings. Table I on the following page outlines the general findings that emerged from the case studies. The findings respond to the research questions and goals posed at the beginning of this paper: to gain a better understanding of what multicultural education means to teachers; how multicultural education is manifested in the classroom; and how school-site factors influence teachers' beliefs and ways of practice.

As the Table reveals, four themes, or dimensions, of teachers' social constructions of multicultural education emerged from interviews and observations. In general, most teachers' beliefs were multidimensional, expressing several themes. The most common themes expressed were "multicultural education as empowering" (e.g., multicultural education places students in an active role in the classroom; stresses critical analysis and questioning of content; or uses social action curriculum projects)"; "multiple perspectives on culture" (i.e., multicultural education analyzes concepts in the curriculum from various cultural perspectives); and "social harmony" (e.g., multicultural education focuses on building positive student relations and a safe classroom climate). The theme cited the least was "school-wide" perspectives (i.e., multicultural education addresses issues beyond the classroom, e.g., staff relations, staff cultural awareness training, school-wide bilingual education policies). In sum, teachers' perspectives of multicultural education extended into issues of content and process.

Three types of classroom enactments surfaced from observations, interviews, and documents. The most common strategy in practice was "empowering enactment," or student-centered instructional strategies (e.g., close teacher-student and peer participation structures; critical analysis; student-generated curriculum; and cooperative learning). Two teachers practiced more "mainstream enactment", or teacher-centered, strategies. Mainstream enactment was also characterized by low-level teacher-student relations, where teachers maintained the traditional distance, or border, between themselves and their students, making mutual learning less likely to occur. One teacher displayed a clear "mix" of teacher-centered and student-centered strategies.

TABLE I

FINDINGS



Major Themes

- Content and process
- Student-Centered and Teacher-Centered Pedagogy
- Language
- Leadership
- Collaboration
- Resources: literature; curriculum developers
- Individual - teacher attitudes: learning and un-learning
- Student - student population and multicultural education

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Variations in beliefs and practices existed among teachers within and across schools. There were differences even among teachers that expressed the *same* theme. Looking to school-site factors to better understand how and why similarities and variations in beliefs and practice arose, the following themes listed in Table I emerged:

Organizational Factors

From teachers' perspectives, the following common organizational factors influenced teachers' ideas and practices across the schools:

- *Leadership*: "Leadership" consisted of a principal and/or a core group of teachers advocating school-wide attention to cultural and/or language diversity and supporting teachers' ideas and input.
- *Structures and norms enabling teacher collaboration*: Collaboration, in the form of school-wide or group reflection on cultural diversity, and the existence, or lack of, everyday informal and formal collaboration played an important role in teachers' views and practices.
- *School-wide programs, training, and instructional philosophies*: Programs ranged from community building (e.g, Tribes) to more explicit academic programs viewed as "multicultural" (e.g., whole language-literature based; Foxfire; bilingual programs).
- *Resources, Materials*: the existence or lack of resources and materials affected teachers' views and practices.
- *School's history, type (e.g., alternative; bilingual; year round), and school funds*:

Individual-Teacher Factors

- Teachers' backgrounds, ethnicity, education, training, and personal beliefs and teaching styles played a role in influencing and producing various teachers' perceptions and practices. However, several teachers stated that their personal commitment to teaching multiculturally only took them so far. Trying to teach multiculturally would be harder, they stressed, if they worked in a school context that did not support their efforts, adopt school-wide multicultural programs, or provide collaborative structures and resources.

Student Factors

- Students -- their background, ethnicity, language needs, grade level, and interests -- also entered into the mix and were perhaps, from teachers' perspectives, the variables most responsible for the evolutionary nature of multicultural education.

Although school-site findings are presented one by one, these factors did not operate in isolation. All or some interacted and connected in various dynamic ways to influence teachers' social constructions and enactments. For example, in one teacher's case, "Joan," all three school-site factors influenced her comprehensive ideas of multicultural education. Joan's deep interest in a student-relations and classroom climate program ("Tribes") grew from the school's decision to

adopt the program and train all teachers. Yet, her more personal philosophy on "teachable moments" (i.e., being open to students' ideas and comments and building on them to create a curriculum lesson) may have influenced how she implemented Tribes. This student-centered philosophy also made her more open to students' views. Thus, students' interests and needs (e.g., interests, cultural backgrounds, and language needs), which changed every year, influenced her views and practices. The school's multicultural focus on anti-bias curriculum and her own personal interest in tackling stereotypes, given the discrimination she faced growing up Asian in the city of "Reynosa," also explained her desire to push students to question and analyze curriculum from critical perspectives. Another organizational factor that seeped into this organic construction was her collaboration with her teaching partner, Linda, whose own personal and professional experiences influenced Joan's ideas and practices.

Major Themes and Insights. Although case studies and a small sample size limit wide-spread generalizations, the findings from this exploratory study of four California urban elementary schools and the nine teachers within them produced a broader understanding of multicultural education and generated several questions for further discussion and research. Below I review some of the larger themes and ideas from the study. I also highlight questions, suggestions, and implications for those individuals who are involved in the field of multicultural education and are interested in its future analysis.

Content and Process

Most teachers addressed both content *and* process. Teachers viewed content as necessary but not sufficient to making education multicultural. The fact that teachers thought about and addressed process issues reveals that multicultural education is not an isolated approach that is concerned mainly with curriculum content, lessons, units, or commercial kits. Rather, *how* one teaches content (instructional strategies) and addresses matters of student and teacher-student interactions (implicit curriculum) is a major part of multicultural teaching. *What* one teaches, is important as well. The history of the multicultural education movement stems mostly from charges concerning the distortion of various ethnic groups' experiences and perspectives displayed in

curriculum content, or the lack of any treatment at all. The focus on pedagogy (the *"how"*) that emerged in this study, however, is an important one. For those practitioners, researchers, and policymakers who believe multicultural education is mainly about celebrations, human relations, and/or building self esteem, the "empowering" pedagogy displayed by several of the teachers in my study revealed that the approach can be academically demanding and involves placing students in active roles in the curriculum process (e.g., generating curriculum, eliciting students' views, using their interests and backgrounds as curriculum, involving students in social action projects). It also involves activating students' minds to think critically about concepts from various perspectives, and involving them in social action projects. Pedagogy also highlights the implicit curriculum, which emphasizes, for example, the role that close, respectful peer *and* teacher-student interactions plays in the learning process.

This study also supports the comments of Sonia Nieto (1992) and James Banks (1991) concerning the pedagogical aspects of multicultural education, such as analyzing concepts from multiple perspectives to hone critical thinking, decision- making, and social action skills. In fact, Banks' "concept" approach to multicultural education directly influenced one teacher in the sample as she consciously drew on his model to design her social studies curriculum. The more "implicit" aspects of the curriculum I observed also highlight Nieto's comments on the important role that "intangibles" -- teacher attitudes, behaviors, and learning environments -- play in multicultural education. Gloria Ladson Billings (1992) also sees teaching styles, behaviors, and beliefs as the "key to making multicultural education work" (p. 106). Several teachers in this study demonstrated the type of instruction that Ladson-Billings has observed in her research on teaching, which "empowers" students by structuring classroom interactions where teaching is less "transmission oriented" and more "interaction oriented," where social relations are "humane," and where teachers "demonstrate a connectedness with all of the students and encourages each of them to do the same" (p. 110, 113).

The Continuum of Pedagogy: Teacher-Centered, Student-Centered

Pedagogy is related to teacher-centered and student-centered instruction, and the related issue of skills versus process teaching. Seven participants in this study (three profiled teachers, three non-profiled staff, and one principal) discussed this topic in relation to teaching minority students. Those teachers and administrators advocating the student-centered and process learning approach (e.g., whole language) stressed the importance of placing students in a role that facilitated student initiative and discovery. It was also a way to personalize the curriculum and make the leaning process more culturally relevant. One principal talked about this issue in relation to "empowering" minority students. She believed that a more student-centered approach communicated to students that their ideas were important and they had control over their actions.

On the other hand, profiled teachers and other staff also discussed the merits of a more teacher-directed approach. One African American teacher at "Hamlin Elementary" was concerned with the school's overriding emphasis on whole-language, process-oriented teaching. Connecting the issue to learning styles, this teacher believed that many students do not come to school with the skills that are needed to take advantage of a more student-centered learning process. She, therefore, argued for more attention to basic skills through structured, teacher-directed instruction. Yet, she also acknowledged the merits of whole language and noted that ideally the two approaches should be wedded. A European American non-profiled teacher at "Meadowbrook Elementary" made the same point concerning the need to wed the two approaches.

The profiled teachers who were more student-centered also occasionally mentioned using more teacher-directed instruction with particular students. "Jessica," the Foxfire teacher at Hamlin, noted this in relation to a few African American boys she felt needed more structure. "Linda" at "Ray Elementary" also discussed this issue in relation to a new African American boy in her class. "Rose" at Meadowbrook connected teacher-directed instruction to basic skills, and also described her efforts to combine student-centered and teacher-centered methods. She and another African American teacher at Hamlin also felt that teacher-directed styles and basic skills were important in light of their deeper commitment to African American students "making it" in society. In addition,

Linda at Ray Elementary and a non-profiled teacher at Meadowbrook remarked that reading Lisa Delpit's article, The Silenced Dialogue (1988), had increased their respect and awareness for different teaching styles. Finally, the two more teacher-centered teachers in the study, said they preferred order and structure in the classroom, but did not necessarily connect their pedagogical strategies to preparing minority students to "make it" in the working world.

What does this all mean? The fact that the more student-centered teachers raised these issues highlights several questions regarding multicultural pedagogy that require further analysis from practitioners, researchers, and policy analysts. One question relates to cultural learning styles. Both the profile and background teachers said they believed that some students with less skills or "different learning styles" may require more explicit, direct instruction instead of the more discovery, open-ended instruction that other students receive. The questions then are: to what extent are teachers using the label of "different learning styles" and "needs" to actually mean lower expectations? (Hilliard, 1989, cited in Ladson-Billings, 1992). Is direct instruction interpreted as providing students with less higher-order activities? Is it linked with teachers' attitudes that "certain" students are less capable of higher-ordered thinking? Do teachers see teaching basic skills and student-centered teaching as mutually exclusive? This study can not provide complete answers to these questions. However, some of the teachers who raised the topic did provide some insights about the importance of providing their students with mixed approaches.

Rose at Meadowbrook, for example, did seem to link basic skills with teacher-directed instruction. Yet, with the school's focus on discovery learning, she said she was consciously trying to use both practices. Thus, she may eventually see how teaching basic skills can be accomplished by placing less emphasis on drill and direction and more emphasis on teaching strategies that aim for deeper student understanding. In addition, Rose's discussion, as well as the interviews with non-profiled teachers at Hamlin and Meadowbrook, highlighted some of the social and academic reasoning behind their call for more balanced teaching approaches. For example, rather than holding lower expectations for her students, Rose said her preference for a more "traditional" teacher-directed approach stemmed from her high expectations of minority students

and her commitment to providing them with skills she felt they needed to succeed in junior high and beyond. Therefore, some teachers in this study did not see addressing cultural learning styles as a matter of lowering expectations or providing sub-standard education. Rather their ideas were embedded in a desire to actually empower students by strengthening their skills base and giving them the tools they felt were needed to succeed on tests and the more rigorous academic tasks they felt were awaiting students in junior high. In her article on "culturally relevant teaching," Ladson-Billings (1992) explains this type of teaching strategy by drawing on Lisa Delpit's work (1986). Ladson-Billings states, "Even in those instances where what teachers are doing looks, 'old-fashioned,' or 'traditional,' a deeper sense of commitment to the students and community is what essentially drives the teachers to discount educational fads" (p. 116).

Some teachers also underscored the importance of wedding the two approaches. For as this study revealed, a more student-centered approach held "empowering" objectives of placing students in active roles in the classroom discourse, and fostering close peer *and* teacher-student interactions so that mutual sharing and learning could occur. Thus, as Delpit (1988) concludes, the issue becomes less of student-centered *versus* teacher-centered or skills *versus* process, but more of a merging of the two approaches and seeing their objectives as less mutually exclusive (p. 296).

Finally, four teachers in this study did not articulate teaching styles or forming teacher-student relations as part of their understanding of multicultural education. There are several possible reasons why they did not discuss these issues. One may be due to the individual teacher's background, such as their lack of training in a program emphasizing process issues. Another reason may be that they simply did not consider these teaching strategies to be a part of multicultural education. Whatever the reasons may be, these teachers' views reaffirms the need for pedagogy to be a more explicit area of training and analysis in multicultural education (Ladson Billings, 1992).

Instructional Strategies and Language Diversity

In schools with large limited English proficient (LEP) student populations, several teachers considered issues of language diversity and bilingual programs as part of their meaning of

multicultural education. If teachers did not include bilingualism as part of their understanding, the existence of bilingual programs and LEP students in their class ultimately affected their practice. The major link between bilingual education and multiculturalism in teachers' minds was the issue of integrating students from different bilingual or monolingual classes for part of the day or once a week. The goal of these programs was to work on second language acquisition and to provide time for students to develop cross-cultural relationships. Although teachers wholly supported these programs, linguistically diverse classrooms posed various problems for several teachers, the main one being structuring lessons so that all students are provided equal access to the learning task at hand. Thus, for several teachers across three schools, multiculturalism involved attention to, and respect for, cultural *and* language diversity and issues of academic equity.

Influencing Factors: School-Site Conditions to Support Multicultural Teaching

This study's findings illustrate that teachers' social constructions and practices are influenced by several organizational, individual and student factors. All of the factors interacted together in teachers' minds, signifying the multiple aspects that are involved in making schooling more multicultural. As teachers working in organizations, the norms and structures operating inside the school emerged as important influential factors. As individuals, elements of their background, interests, and styles also shaped their ideas. And many teachers constructed their beliefs and practices from the individuals with whom they interacted with daily -- their students. Below I briefly discuss the questions and issues raised with each influencing factor. I also discuss possible implications and suggestions for practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and teacher educators.

Organizational Factors

Leadership. Schools with a more coherent and explicit multicultural focus were those that had strong principal or core teacher leadership that placed issues of cultural diversity at the heart of their educational mission. This overall consciousness, climate, or explicit focus influenced several teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. Yet, naturally, leadership and a school focus did not ensure uniform views and methods of multicultural teaching. This diversity of ideas and practices

reveals that having a full-blown multicultural program set in stone is unrealistic. Rather, addressing and developing educational approaches that are multicultural is a process of constructing meaning, which is often recursive and marked by experimentation and collective reflections (Nieto, 1992, p. 273). The variation among teachers within the same school in this study signified the interrelated nature of these school-site factors. This variation may also depict the difficulty of changing individual teachers' attitudes and philosophies.

In addition, in each school, the issue of balancing the responsibilities and roles between teachers and principals forging school-wide change was raised. Teachers believed that teacher input was essential to developing a school-wide multicultural focus. But having a principal who was committed to bilingualism and multiculturalism, and actively helped teachers implement these reforms, was also extremely important.

Collaboration. The influence of collaborative school structures on teachers' constructions and practices raises several issues. First, holding staff retreats to examine attitudes on cultural diversity, and assumptions and goals underlying the curriculum was cited as an important step in the evolutionary process of making education multicultural. The key characteristic of this collaboration, was that it be on-going. McLaughlin's (1992) work on school context highlights the impact a "collaborative community of teacher learners" has on teacher thinking and practice (p. 15). From her research in schools, she stresses that tackling educational challenges requires teacher-as-learner norms that support on-going inquiry and reflection. Several teachers and administrators in this study also expressed the vital role these norms and structures play in developing a multicultural approach to education.

The fact that training and dialogue be continuous is extremely important for two basic reasons. First it institutionalizes the process and helps to make it more meaningful. Second, an on-going focus and collective analysis may reduce the cynicism I heard from several teachers who were suspicious of one-shot "diversity training sessions." A serious topic deserves serious attention; which several teachers and one principal acknowledged. By placing this topic on the table in a conscious way, teachers can also address any cynicism or discomfort with the term

"multicultural education," (which I heard from several teachers in my study) and begin to define what this approach means to them and what they would like to see it come to mean at their school.

In sum, important factors in developing and supporting multicultural teaching were school structures that contained formal and informal means of on-going collaboration to critically discuss personal and academic issues related to multicultural education. Teachers' comments in this study echo McLaughlin's work on professional norms of collaboration, as well as Nieto's (1992) and Christine Sleeter's (1992) findings that highlight the importance of creating time and structures for teachers to meet and discuss how to make education more multicultural for their students. Staff awareness training also clearly reveals the desire among many of the teachers for more teacher education in cultural diversity. Over and over, teachers discussed the lack of knowledge they felt they, or teachers in general, lacked in this area. Thus, as Nieto states (1992), teacher learning and unlearning is fundamental to the process of becoming a multicultural teacher.

School-wide Programs, Resources. The numerous school-wide programs (e.g., whole language and Tribes) in this study that influenced teachers' beliefs and practices raises several questions. First, at all of the schools teachers stressed a move away from texts and basals toward a whole-language, literature-based program, which they felt helped make the curriculum more culturally relevant for their students. This was true even in the district that had adopted the state social studies text. What does the shift toward literature say about the resources needed to teach multiculturally? Clearly, most teachers in this study did not find the texts wholly useful in their efforts to make the curriculum more meaningful and relevant to students' lives. The move towards literature and primary resources thus means less reliance on texts to structure lessons and placing teachers in the role of curriculum developers. With the exception of Meadowbrook Elementary, which had Consent Decree funds to hire resource teachers to develop curriculum and gather materials, the other three schools had to apply for grants or use other funds to acquire multicultural literature and materials. As a result, several teachers repeatedly said they needed more literature and resources to teach multiculturally. Finally, curriculum development requires a vast amount of

time and energy. Many teachers remarked that they needed larger blocks of time and compensation for their efforts.

Other programs, such as Tribes, which many teachers viewed as multicultural, highlighted teachers' beliefs that multicultural education involved process issues -- building a safe, trusting community within the classroom based on positive student relations. The only element that appeared to be missing in Tribes was a focus on addressing teacher-student interactions, teacher perceptions of students, and the importance of creating participation structures in which teachers listen, talk, and construct meaning with children.

Individual Factors

The existence in this study of several socially and politically conscious teachers who were personally committed to issues of diversity raises the question whether multicultural education simply requires the recruitment of progressively minded teachers. While recruitment of such teachers may help, the fact that two of the schools had or were attempting to create a multicultural focus on a school-wide level indicates that an effort was underway to reach all teachers, regardless of their backgrounds or personal values. The fact that the majority of Ray Elementary teachers voted to adopt a multicultural focus, and the Hamlin staff voted to adopt a whole language multicultural literature slant, reveals that many teachers, irrespective of political and social activism, recognized the need to address the culturally diverse classrooms they faced each day.

Still, what individual factors tell us is that teachers' meanings of multicultural education will vary despite a school focus, and that deeply embedded views are difficult to change. Several teachers and administrators said this is why an open, safe, teacher-as-learner environment was important. As one principal stressed, "teachers were not born with or without cross cultural capabilities. We can invite people to learn and do it in a positive, meaningful way" (SI 2/2, 550). Her comment returns to the basic premise of this study: that teachers beliefs are social constructions. Thus, beliefs and awareness can

expand and change given the time to reflect and the school-site norms that encourage this learning to occur.

Student Factors

Students' backgrounds, teacher perceptions of them, and other student characteristics played a large role in influencing teachers' ideas and practices regarding multicultural education. One of the recurring issues that emerged in the study concerned responding to the student population in one's classroom or school. For example, although Meadowbrook Elementary had a monthly ethnic studies curriculum, and assemblies for various cultures, the administrator and some teachers believed that the general overriding school focus should address African Americans, the largest group in the school. Other teachers throughout the study generally stated that multicultural education meant addressing the needs of the students in their classroom. There were also schools where attention to smaller constituencies was provided or requested by teachers from that particular ethnic minority group (for example, some African American teachers at Hamlin, a predominantly Latino school, were concerned about meeting the African American students' needs).

These issues raise the pragmatic question of how many cultural perspectives and experiences can actually be addressed in the curriculum , given the significant time and fiscal constraints these schools are under. The choice to focus more on the larger student population could also easily be applied to schools with large European American student populations. If schools are predominantly White, does this mean that this group's perspectives receives more weight in the overall educational mission of the school? The question then arises: Is multicultural education only for schools with culturally diverse student populations? And in schools that are diverse, do the needs of smaller populations receive less weight?

These comments, however, did not reflect the practice of the schools in this study. None of the schools excluded any one culture from school-wide events, and none of the teachers were interested in studying only one cultural perspective. Every school, due to its multicultural population, made an effort to address the needs of all the groups at their school either through school-wide events or the curriculum. Yet, these handful of

comments do unveil deeper issues that practitioners may need to explore as they develop their educational vision.

Teachers' Social Construction: An Organic Process

This exploratory study found that the construction of teachers' meanings and practices involved a dynamic process in which multiple school-site factors continually interacted to influence teachers social constructions and enactments. And, because of this multifaceted, organic process, the majority of teachers' beliefs and practices of multicultural education were comprehensive.

As far as isolating a single school-site factor that most influenced teachers' beliefs and practices, this study revealed that all three general areas (organization, teacher, student) interacted to affect this process. Yet, the influential factors teachers discussed most were connected to the organizational context in which they worked. Even those teachers who expressed the most personal, political, and social commitments to multicultural education said that being in a school that offered a variety of supports greatly assisted them in their efforts to teach multiculturally -- something they would not have been able to do as successfully or pervasively in a less supportive school environment. Teachers also said that interactions with colleagues, administrators, and students were especially influential. In short, although individual styles and values are deeply embedded, and will always be the source of natural variation at the classroom level, this study illustrated that organizational structures, norms (e.g., collaborating with colleagues), programs, resources, and students played a large role in shaping teachers' multicultural perspectives and practices.

As Sleeter argues in her recent research on organizations and multicultural education (1992), attention needs to shift from fixing individual teachers to re-evaluating the organizations in which they work. This statement can easily be applied to this study. Take for example, "Kathy" at Ray Elementary. Kathy often expressed her frustration with curriculum development, the lack of collaboration and resources, the year round schedule, and the size of the school. If she were to move to a school, such as Meadowbrook, which is smaller, has a structured multicultural curriculum guide, resources, and strong collaborative structures, her perceptions and practices of

multicultural education might eventually change in some manner. This is purely speculative, but I offer it as an example of how the social organization of a school could influence teachers' meanings and classroom practices.

Again, however, this is not to say that variation among teachers within a school is unhealthy. Conversely, it is a phenomenon that will realistically always exist given the uniqueness of individuals. And, as Rosenholtz (1989) states, individuals play an active, reciprocal role in shaping the structures and norms within the organizational context that influence their meanings and practices. Therefore, policymakers, teachers, and administrators who are interested in making schools more multicultural may find it useful to take a social-organizational perspective when developing or implementing reforms. As this study shows, it is important to account for the influence of organizational factors on teachers' meanings and classroom enactments, including the individual's role in this social construction process.

Finally, the organic nature of teachers' social constructions and practices in this study raises questions about the role of "programs" in multicultural education. Two years ago, when I started to develop ideas for this study, I initially wanted to find a multicultural "program" to analyze and observe in action. When I could not identify a formal program, and instead entered the schools to conduct an exploratory study, I found that teachers listed a host of programs (Tribes, bilingual education) that they believed constituted a multicultural approach to education. At every school, teachers also adopted programs (e.g., whole language) to either legitimize what they were already doing or to create a sense of school unity around an educational vision. I found that the objectives and definitions of various programs were closely interrelated, or that individuals took bits and pieces of various programs to form a different approach. In short, I was struck by the plethora of "programs" in the four schools.

This focus and near obsession with programs is also reflected in policy research, where an isolated "program" is often the focus of the analysis. What I found in this study was that multicultural education was far from being a "program." Rather, it was a way of thinking and teaching that extended into every aspect of the school. The same can be said for the variety of

programs in the schools that wove in and out of each other and were part of the larger fabric of education. In sum, this study suggests that research on "multicultural education" should take a less "program" approach and more of an "organizational" perspective in order to better understand the meaning and practice of multicultural education at a school site.

* * *

The goal of the exploratory dissertation study summarized in this paper was to provide a broader understanding of multicultural education from teachers' perspectives. By listening to teachers and entering their classrooms, some of the constellation of factors that influenced teachers' social constructions and practices emerged. Identifying school-site factors from which teachers construct their beliefs is not intended to provide a fixed recipe for teachers or schools to become instantly multicultural. On the contrary, these four schools and nine teachers revealed that reforming one's educational approach to address multiculturalism is a *process* in which a variety of core factors constantly interact to influence meanings and practices.

The findings that teachers' perceptions and practices dealt with content and process, and were linked to a variety of factors in the school environment, signifies that promoting multicultural education may require comprehensive school-wide strategies. Rather than being a program that is "plugged in," or an approach expected to be implemented after one day of staff development training, teaching multiculturally, as seen from these teachers' perspectives, involves attending to the various school-site factors from which teachers construct their meanings and practices. In addition, although variations among teachers existed, all of them worked in contexts in which cultural diversity was at the heart of the school's educational reforms. The comprehensive nature of multicultural education in this study, therefore, highlights the issue of viewing multicultural education as part and parcel of school reform and the school culture, rather than an adjunct event, lesson, or program (Olsen, et al., 1994; Sleeter, 1992; Gould, 1991).

In sum, this study provided a snapshot of four schools and nine teachers in the process of trying to make education more multicultural. Though future analysis is needed, this study takes another step towards filling the gaps in knowledge within the field of multicultural education. By

entering into four elementary schools and eight classrooms, more information now exists concerning teachers' social constructions and enactments, the factors that influenced them, and the school-site conditions needed to construct a multicultural education for all students.

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